

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

COMMUNICATING,

In compliance with a resolution of the Senate of the 8th instant, information concerning recent conversations or communications with insurgents, under executive sanction.

FEBRUARY 10, 1865.—Read, motion to refer to select committee of five members, ordered to lie on the table, and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate of the United States :

In answer to the resolution of the Senate, of the 8th instant, requesting information concerning recent conversations or communications with insurgents, under executive sanction, I transmit a report from the Secretary of State, to whom the resolution was referred.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

WASHINGTON, *February 10, 1865.*

To the President :

The Secretary of State, to whom was referred a resolution of the Senate of the 8th instant, requesting "the President of the United States, if, in his opinion, not incompatible with the public interests, to furnish to the Senate any information in his possession concerning recent conversations or communications with certain rebels, said to have taken place under executive sanction, including communications with the rebel Jefferson Davis, and any correspondence relating thereto," has the honor to report that the Senate may properly be referred to a special message of the President bearing upon the subject of the resolution, and transmitted to the House this day. Appended to this report is a copy of an instruction which has been addressed to Charles Francis Adams, esq., envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the United States at London, and which is the only correspondence found in this department touching the subject referred to in the resolution.

Respectfully submitted.

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, February 10, 1865.

Mr. Seward to Mr. Adams.

No. 1258.]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, February 7, 1865.

SIR : It is a truism that in times of peace there are always instigators of war. So soon as a war begins there are citizens who impatiently demand negotiations for peace. The advocates of war, after an agitation, longer or shorter, generally gain their fearful end, though the war declared is not unfrequently unnecessary and unwise. So peace agitators in time of war ultimately bring about an abandonment of the conflict, sometimes without securing the advantages which were originally expected from the conflict.

The agitators for war in time of peace, and for peace in time of war, are not necessarily, or perhaps ordinarily, unpatriotic in their purposes or motives. Results alone determine whether they are wise or unwise. The treaty of peace concluded at Guadalupe Hidalgo was secured by an irregular negotiator, under the ban of the government. Some of the efforts which have been made to bring about negotiations with a view to end our civil war are known to the whole world, because they have employed foreign as well as domestic agents. Others, with whom you have had to deal confidentially, are known to yourself, although they have not publicly transpired. * Other efforts have occurred here which are known only to the persons actually moving in them and to this government. I am now to give, for your information, an account of an affair, of the same general character, which recently received much attention here, and which, doubtless, will excite inquiry abroad.

A few days ago Francis P. Blair, esq., of Maryland, obtained from the President a simple leave to pass through our military lines, without definite views known to the government. Mr. Blair visited Richmond, and on his return he showed to the President a letter which Jefferson Davis had written to Mr. Blair, in which Davis wrote that Mr. Blair was at liberty to say to President Lincoln that Davis was now, as he always had been, willing to send commissioners, if assured they would be received, or to receive any that should be sent; that he was not disposed to find obstacles in forms. He would send commissioners to confer with the President, with a view to a restoration of peace between the two countries, if he could be assured they would be received. The President thereupon, on the 18th of January, addressed a note to Mr. Blair, in which the President, after acknowledging that he had read the note of Mr. Davis, said that he was, is, and always should be willing to receive any agents that Mr. Davis or any other influential person now actually resisting the authority of the government might send to confer informally with the President, with a view to the restoration of peace to the people of our one common country. Mr. Blair visited Richmond with this letter, and then again came back to Washington. On the 29th instant we were advised from the camp of Lieutenant General Grant that Alexander H. Stephens, R. M. T. Hunter, and John A. Campbell were applying for leave to pass through the lines to Washington, as peace commissioners, to confer with the President. They were permitted by the Lieutenant General to come to his headquarters, to await there the decision of the President. Major Eckert was sent down to meet the party from Richmond at General Grant's headquarters. The major was directed to deliver to them a copy of the President's letter to Mr. Blair, with a note to be addressed to them, and signed by the major, in which they were directly informed that if they should be allowed to pass our lines they would be understood as coming for an informal conference, upon the basis of the aforementioned letter of the 18th of January to Mr. Blair. If they should express their assent to this condition in writing, then Major Eckert was directed to give them safe conduct to Fortress Monroe, where a person coming from the President would meet them. It being thought prob-

able, from a report of their conversation with Lieutenant General Grant, that the Richmond party would, in the manner prescribed, accept the condition mentioned, the Secretary of State was charged by the President with the duty of representing this government in the expected informal conference. The Secretary arrived at Fortress Monroe in the night of the first day of February. Major Eckert met him in the morning of the second of February with the information that the persons who had come from Richmond had not accepted, in writing, the condition upon which he was allowed to give them conduct to Fortress Monroe. The major had given the same information by telegraph to the President, at Washington. On receiving this information, the President prepared a telegram directing the Secretary to return to Washington. The Secretary was preparing, at the same moment, to so return, without waiting for instructions from the President; but at this juncture Lieutenant General Grant telegraphed to the Secretary of War, as well as to the Secretary of State, that the party from Richmond had reconsidered and accepted the conditions tendered them through Major Eckert, and General Grant urgently advised the President to confer in person with the Richmond party. Under these circumstances, the Secretary, by the President's direction, remained at Fortress Monroe, and the President joined him there on the night of the 2d of February. The Richmond party was brought down the James river in a United States steam transport during the day, and the transport was anchored in Hampton Roads.

On the morning of the 3d the President, attended by the Secretary, received Messrs. Stephens, Hunter, and Campbell on board the United States steam transport *River Queen*, in Hampton Roads. The conference was altogether informal. There was no attendance of secretaries, clerks, or other witnesses. Nothing was written or read. The conversation, although earnest and free, was calm, and courteous, and kind on both sides. The Richmond party approached the discussion rather indirectly, and at no time did they either make categorical demands, or tender formal stipulations, or absolute refusals. Nevertheless, during the conference, which lasted four hours, the several points at issue between the government and the insurgents were distinctly raised, and discussed fully, intelligently, and in an amicable spirit. What the insurgent party seemed chiefly to favor was a postponement of the question of separation, upon which the war is waged, and a mutual direction of efforts of the government, as well as those of the insurgents, to some extrinsic policy or scheme for a season, during which passions might be expected to subside, and the armies be reduced, and trade and intercourse between the people of both sections resumed. It was suggested by them that through such postponement we might now have immediate peace, with some not very certain prospect of an ultimate satisfactory adjustment of political relations between this government and the States, section, or people now engaged in conflict with it.

This suggestion, though deliberately considered, was nevertheless regarded by the President as one of armistice or truce, and he announced that we can agree to no cessation or suspension of hostilities, except on the basis of the disbandment of the insurgent forces, and the restoration of the national authority throughout all the States in the Union. Collaterally, and in subordination to the proposition which was thus announced, the anti-slavery policy of the United States was reviewed in all its bearings, and the President announced that he must not be expected to depart from the positions he had heretofore assumed in his proclamation of emancipation and other documents, as these positions were reiterated in his last annual message. It was further declared by the President that the complete restoration of the national authority everywhere was an indispensable condition of any assent on our part to whatever form of peace might be proposed. The President assured the other party that, while he must adhere to these positions, he would be prepared, so far as power is lodged with the Executive, to exercise liberality. His power, however, is limited by the Con-

stitution; and when peace should be made, Congress must necessarily act in regard to appropriations of money and to the admission of representatives from the insurrectionary States. The Richmond party were then informed that Congress had, on the 31st ultimo, adopted by a constitutional majority a joint resolution submitting to the several States the proposition to abolish slavery throughout the Union, and that there is every reason to expect that it will be soon accepted by three-fourths of the States, so as to become a part of the national organic law.

The conference came to an end by mutual acquiescence, without producing an agreement of views upon the several matters discussed, or any of them. Nevertheless, it is perhaps of some importance that we have been able to submit our opinions and views directly to prominent insurgents, and to hear them in answer in a courteous and not unfriendly manner.

I am, sir, your obedient servant,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.